

# **Conflict Intervention for School Bus Drivers**

Reference Guide and Test

## **Introduction**

**I** School bus drivers are faced with behavioral issues nearly every day they are transporting students during the course of the school year. From the mundane to the extreme, bus drivers must know how to assess the situation, have a plan in place and act efficiently. They must do all of this while keeping their cool.

**II** School bus drivers must keep the following questions in mind: Do you know how YOU would react if faced with a violent fight on the school bus? Would you know how to keep your cool if there is a student in your face, berating you? Do you know the procedures to be followed when these issues take place? And what role can the school team play to help drivers feel empowered when faced with conflict on the school bus? These questions and many more are answered in the video.

**III** We don't have an answer for EVERY situation and you need to realize that not every situation is black and white. However, we can provide you with effective tools to help you understand how to intervene when conflicts may take place on the bus.

## **Part 1: Communication, Directives and Keeping Your Cool**

**1)** Wouldn't it be nice if we lived in a world where students enter the bus with a smile, follow all of the rules, never fight and never argue: where everyone on the bus gets along, listens to the bus driver and the result is a peaceful, non confrontational ride to school and home everyday? Well, as we all know - we don't live in that world.

**2)** Driving school buses in today's world presents many challenges for school bus drivers. Technology has made it easier to bully and harass other students. Fights can start out of nowhere and we have all heard the stories about bus drivers snapping at misbehaved students.

**3)** **As a professional bus driver, you have to be able to intervene in a wide variety of conflicts.** You must know how to assertively take charge if a

fight takes place on the bus. In addition, the bus driver must always keep in mind, the safety of students who are innocent bystanders. You must know the proper steps to take when such instances arise. You must know how to be the adult, teacher and example setter. That means you must keep your emotions under control. That's a tall order for any driver, but it's a worthy standard to follow.

**4) Knowing how to communicate when conflict presents itself is half the battle.** We don't expect you to have a degree in psychology. However, there are some things we would like you to know to help you understand how to communicate to students with behavioral problems.

**5) When communicating with students, it is important that you give directives that students will understand.** When giving directives to students, they should be **clear, concrete and specific.**

**6) You should avoid directives that are vague and wordy.** Vague or wordy directives are typically used when people feel frustrated or angry. Always be direct and to the point. Make sure you are being specific with students and also allow time for appropriate behavior to occur.

**7) There have been numerous instances in which bus drivers have lost their cool and taken out their frustration on disruptive students.** We all know that children act out of emotion. Specifically, students who are at the age where their hormones may cause them to act out even more. It is important to understand that children have a hard time communicating their emotions. Therefore, there may be increased instances where they are testing you and pushing boundaries.

**8) YOU WILL BE TESTED.** There will be times where you will need to keep calm even if a student is screaming in your face. Imagine you are disciplining a student and that student berates you, yells obscenities at you and in extremely rare cases, even attempts to put their hands on you. Do you know how you would react?

**9)** In the video, we show 2 different scenarios. One where the driver is pulled into an argument with the student. She lets her emotions get the best of her and she grabs the student's arm angrily when the student pushes at the driver. She reacted to the student and let her emotions get to her.

**10)** In the second scenario, the driver kept her cool. By doing this, the driver still let the consequences be known to the student. She didn't get pulled into an argument and she simply stated the facts while keeping a calm, firm tone. If you are ever encountered with this type of behavior, it is important to keep a level head with the understanding that you are dealing with an emotional child.

**11)** Understand that you have a CHOICE. Letting your emotions get the best of you can have unfortunate consequences. Not only could you hurt a child, but your career as a bus driver would more than likely come to an end. In addition to that, your actions are a reflection of the school district or organization you are working for.

**12)** Here is something else to think about. Have You ever noticed how siblings can be arguing, fighting and going at it? Then the second mom or dad walk in - they are at full attention. The reason for this is that parents create a climate in which they are respected. You should create the same climate on your school bus.

**13)** Try to establish a rapport with all the students on your bus. If you establish a rapport with students, you will gain their respect. Ultimately, your students will be more receptive to listening to you because they respect you. That's called a learned response.

**14)** There are going to be times throughout your career where you are going to be tested. It will be up to you to keep a level head and not react out of anger or frustration. You don't want to be the next YouTube hit. Remember, your attitude is a reflection of your district or organization. And most of all, you never want to hurt a child out of anger.

## **Part 2: Intervention and Procedures for Fights on the School Bus**

**15)** It is important to **follow your schools policies and state laws in regards to fights on the school bus.** We don't want to get into specific legalities for when fights do occur since there are so many grey areas to consider and situations may vastly differ. However, we can provide you with a number of procedural steps and intervention strategies that can be implemented in ANY bus on ANY given day.

**16)** When a fight occurs on the school bus, the first thing you have to do is assess the situation:

- a)** Is the bus in motion?
- b)** Where is the fight taking place?
- c)** Are there other students on board?

**17)** Keep in mind that if a fight erupts, you are not **REQUIRED** to put yourself at risk. But you **must behave in a reasonable manner to reduce danger to not only the fighting students, but also other students and yourself.**

**18)** **Drivers who pay close attention can prevent fights from taking place to begin with. By paying close attention to students body language, tone of voice, or other verbal or physical gestures, a driver can recognize hostility and separate students before things escalate.** They can even talk with the students together or separately depending on the situation. If a resolution is formed before a fight takes place, then you won't have to go through the procedures we are about to cover. Many times you can instinctively feel the aggression in the air. Try to catch it before it gets out of hand.

**19)** If a fight **DOES** break out on the bus and the bus is in motion, you will have to find a safe location to pull over. While you are finding that location, you can verbally try to get the students attention. Not by panicking and screaming, but by using a calm, assertive and authoritative voice. If it continues, you should notify

dispatch immediately. Let them know that a fight is taking place and you are going to pull over to address it. Give them any details you can, keeping in mind that you need to get the bus safely pulled over as soon as possible.

**20) Once the bus is pulled over, make sure to secure it and take the key from the ignition. Then it will be time to act and take charge.** Once again, directives should be given in a calm, assertive tone. Let directives be clear and specific. Also, when addressing the fighting students, remember to try and call them by name. This is a technique often used to help get the students' attention.

**21) Many times when students are involved in a fight, they are so lost in the moment that they cannot even hear the outside world. When this happens you can try to use distractions as another technique. Distractions can be any type of loud noise such banging a clipboard against the seat, or a loud clap to get the fighting students' attention.**

**22) If you are able to get the students attention and they stop fighting:**

- a) Make sure to separate and continue to monitor their behavior. This also shows how students are more willing to listen if you have their respect.**
- b) Assess whether or not there are any injuries and decide whether first aid is needed.**
- c) Contact dispatch and give them an update.**
- d) If you cannot get the students attention and the fight continues, keep trying verbal intervention and distraction techniques.**

**23) The other thing you have to be mindful of is the other students on the bus. We all know that fights are not stationary. The fight may spill over into the aisle and onto other students seats. This has the potential for students to get injured.** If fighting continues, you need to work to keep yourself and other students safe. You will need to disperse them to a neutral location on the bus as far away from the fighting students as possible. **And if it gets so violent that you fear for the students' safety, you will need to have them evacuate**

**the bus and immediately call 911.**

**24)** So, what if there is a fight with one of the students getting absolutely pummeled? Well, that is where the grey area lies. It is going to be up to you to see how your district handles such situations. How much protection are you allowed to give to the student that is taking a beating? Should you attempt to stand between them? Should you put yourself in harms way if the safety of the student is a concern? If a student looks like they are obviously being attacked, you would call 911 immediately. What the driver COULD and SHOULD do from there is a touchy subject. Yet, it is one that should be discussed within your organization to see how it should be handled if faced with it.

**25) Whenever a student acts out, a fight occurs, or any other type of behavioral event takes place on the bus, you will have to enforce consequences.** This is not only for the students who act out, but is a warning to ALL students that there will be consequences for behavioral outbursts.

**26)** It will be your job to set the tone for school bus rules and consequences at the beginning of the school year. Let students not only know the rules, but also the consequences that may ensue. If you have a warning system for discipline on your bus, let it be clear what the warnings would entail:

- a) How many warnings would students get?
- b) What are the consequences for breaking bus rules?
- c) Are there behavioral acts that would automatically get a student suspended or expelled from the bus?

**27) It is also recommended that students sign a school bus contract at the start of each year.** Clearly outline the rules and make sure they understand them. By signing it they agree to follow such rules. In addition to the students signing a contract, parents should have one as well. This is so they know that their child will be held accountable if they become disruptive or extremely unruly on the bus. **Both students and their parents should be able to clearly understand all of the school bus rules and consequences for**

## **misbehavior.**

**28)** One of the most important things to realize as a school bus driver, is that you are not alone. Drivers face a plethora of behavioral issues everyday. From the mundane to the extreme. When faced with behavioral issues on the school bus, it should be a relief knowing that you have a reliable team that you can turn to. The school team is composed of transportation and school administration officials. They are an additional resource. They can take authoritative action by bringing parents in. And most of all, they are an additional support for you. Sometimes you may honestly not know WHAT to do. And that is where all of the pieces to the school team come together.

**29)** If faced with a defiant unruly student, extreme bullying, or a fight breaks out on the bus, it will be your job to report the incident. These types of incidents need to be addressed immediately, BOTH to the transportation director and depending on the severity of the incident, the principal.

**30)** Earlier in the video, we stressed the importance of controlling your emotions and keeping calm. This is important for when reporting the incident. You want the best recollection of the events that have transpired. During an emergency situation, you will be required to stay focused on all of the interrelated pieces of the incident or emergency. While each situation will be different and can have a lot of moving parts, you will need to stay focused on your responsibility. And that is to work to provide a safe environment for all passengers regardless of their involvement in the incident.

**31)** **Many school buses today have cameras equipped on them.** The video footage from these can be accessed by the transportation director in the case of an extreme incident taking place on the bus, or if there are conflicting stories.

**33)** During the course of the video, we covered many issues concerning different types of conflict on the school bus. **Whether with a disruptive student, a bullying incident, or a fight, you have to be able to do your best to effectively intervene and at the same time, keep your cool and your**

**passengers safe.** Remember that you are the professional, you are the adult and you are the authority on the bus. Remember to use clear, direct commands and use the tools we have supplied in this video to help you intervene when conflict arises. Remember to stay focused when a fight takes place and that you can rely on the school team for additional support. And of course, remember to stay safe! Thanks for watching.

## TEST QUESTIONS

1) Approach all fights that take place on the school bus exactly the same.

**TRUE or FALSE**

2) Behavioral issues happen nearly everyday on the school bus.

**TRUE or FALSE**

3) When giving directives to students, they should be clear, concrete and specific.

**TRUE or FALSE**

4) The best way to get through to a student is to raise your voice louder than theirs.

**TRUE or FALSE**

5) You can earn students' respect by establishing a rapport with them.

**TRUE or FALSE**

6) Letting your emotions get the best of you can have unfortunate consequences.

**TRUE or FALSE**

7) You can possibly prevent conflicts by reading students' body language and tone.

**TRUE or FALSE**

8) You can try to call students by name as a distraction technique.

**TRUE or FALSE**

9) The school team is not important since they are not on the bus when behavioral issues take place.

**TRUE or FALSE**

10) Conflict emergencies need to be immediately reported and addressed to the proper supervisors.

**TRUE or FALSE**

## **ANSWER KEY**

- 1) FALSE**
- 2) TRUE**
- 3) TRUE**
- 4) FALSE**
- 5) TRUE**
- 6) TRUE**
- 7) TRUE**
- 8) TRUE**
- 9) FALSE**
- 10) TRUE**